

Jacob on the Run

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter 2 in Genesis chapter 28, and reading again at verse 16.

In Genesis 28 at verse 16, Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.

And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Now this incident that we have here of Jacob on the run from home, and lying down in the wilderness, as we're told elsewhere in Scripture, a howling wilderness, and where he's given this amazing dream by the Lord and given such great covenant blessings, is the kind of, it's certainly one of the stories in the Bible that warms our heart.

It certainly warms my heart. Should have read from a wee bit in chapter 27, because there we have probably a fuller picture of what has actually happened.

[1 : 18] Because you remember that Jacob had to run from home. When we read in chapter 28, you'd think that everything was fine, and that he just went off, his father was sending him away.

But if we had gone back to verse 41 of the previous chapter, we find it saying there, Now Esau hated Jacob, because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him.

And Esau said to himself, The days of mourning for my father are approaching, then I will kill my brother Jacob. And so on. We read then, of course, how these words of Esau were passed on to Rebekah.

And Rebekah had said to Jacob, Look, you're going to have to run. You're going to have to run away. You're going to have to run from here. And the excuse was made that we find that in verse 46, Rebekah said to Isaac, I loathe my life because of the Hittite women.

If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me? So you see, she's making an excuse that Jacob is going away down, back to her homeland in order to find a wife.

[2 : 26] But it was because, the real reason, was because Esau was planning to kill Jacob. Part of the problem here was that this was a house that was divided.

It was a house that was divided in a very foolish way because it's very obvious that Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob.

And I think it's obvious that Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau. We're told that Esau loved Isaac. Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game.

But Rebekah loved Jacob. We're told that back in Genesis chapter 25. And that will always cause bitterness and resentment and jealousy in a home where there is a division brought about by a parent or parents loving one child more than another, showing favoritism.

Now, of course, children can sometimes, they can come to the wrong conclusion because it's possible that in a home, a child thinks that he or she is not loved as much as the other because, for instance, suppose you have a mischievous child who's always getting into trouble, who's always getting rows.

[3 : 51] You might have a home where there's just, for instance, there's two children and one lives in such a way that rarely gets told off and the other is never out of trouble because of the type of personality, the type of nature.

And one child can come to the conclusion, my parents don't love me as much as the other. Now, of course, the conclusion they've come to is our own conclusion because I would imagine that in the vast, vast, vast majority of homes, of all the homes surely that I know, is that parents love all their children just the same.

If you don't, then there's going to be problems, there's going to be difficulties, and that's exactly what happened in this home. It was a home that there was division because one was loved more than another.

And we remember how Isaac knew what God's promise was. God had made a promise regarding the twins that Rebecca was carrying. And that promise involved the elder, the oldest twin, the twin that was going to be born first because God had revealed.

Remember when Rebecca was expecting and she was wondering about the excessive turmoil that was going on inside. And she brought it and was praying about it, and God revealed that she was carrying twins and that the elder, the older, the twin that would be born first, would serve the younger.

[5 : 19] So that the younger of the twins was going to exercise, as it were, lordship over the other. And Isaac should have given the special blessing to Jacob, but he wasn't going to.

He was going to give it to Esau. He was determined because, it tells us, Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game. He loved that.

He loved Esau because of what Esau, the kind of person Esau was and what Esau was doing. And, of course, he was all wrong in this way, and he was determined to give the special blessing to Esau. Now, I'm sure we all remember how Jacob tricked his father into getting the special blessing. And Jacob had tricked his brother, and he had tricked his father.

And remember how he had also got the birthright at a time when Esau was in a really difficult situation where he was starving, and he would have done anything.

[6 : 21] And he sold his birthright. So Esau lost both his birthright and he lost the special blessing. And Esau was absolutely raging. And that's what we read there in verse 41, how Esau hated Jacob.

And he said to himself, the days of mourning for my father are approaching. In other words, my father, soon going to die, will have a time of mourning, and as soon as that, then I will kill my brother Jacob.

And so Jacob had to run from home. And it was very difficult for Jacob running away from home because Jacob, as we know, was a home-loving boy.

And he had to run away from all the comforts and from all the security and all that he was familiar with. Because that's what the Bible tells us. That he was the kind of boy, Esau was the wilder character.

Esau was the one who was always on the way going out and he was always hunting. He was a real outdoor fellow. Whereas Jacob was much more a homeboy. And so it's a homeboy who's having to leave everything and run.

[7 : 24] And here he is away in this dangerous environment. I pray to wild animals. I pray to thieves and robbers. And he lies down on this particular night with a pillow, a stone for a pillow, and the open sky as a blanket.

And he's away from his home, from his familiar surroundings, from his security, from everything that he knows and he loves. And so verse 11 tells us that he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set.

Now Jacob stopping there, as we see very clearly, he didn't stop there because this place had more significance than any other place. It didn't matter where he would stop.

One place was as isolated and lonely as the other. He only stopped there because the sun had set. In other words, he couldn't go any further that night. It had started to get dark.

And he says, well, I might as well just stop here. Circumstance rather than choice dictated the location. And yet this night was going to turn out for Jacob.

[8 : 38] Here he is, this sad, lonely character. Broken hearted, I would imagine. Can you, here is somebody who just loved to be at home. This was his life, probably was a very simple life.

He liked security. He liked everything to be familiar. Some people are like that. They like everything to be just as it normally is. And admit that they need this kind of security.

It gives them a security in life, everything just to be as it is. There's other people who don't live like that. And they don't need that. They don't need the surrounds. They don't need what they're familiar with.

They've got a much more adventurous spirit. Well, Jacob was the kind who needed the familiarity to give him that security. He loved the home. And here he was, isolated, lonely, away from everything, away from his family, away from everything that was precious to him in this life.

And he felt, no doubt, so lonely, so vulnerable, so empty, so insecure. He can almost enter a wee bit into the way that Jacob was thinking.

[9 : 46] And yet that very night was going to be for him, up to that point, the greatest experience that he had ever experienced. Although there would be even greater experiences, up to this point, was the greatest.

And when he wakened, it tells us what he says, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. And that shows us that the Lord is often present when we don't realize it, when we're not anticipating it.

Sometimes the Lord is present, and we have no knowledge of it. And so that was true in Jacob's experience. Now we've got to remember, Jacob didn't have a full Bible like you and I have.

because we can go to the Bible, and there are some of the most glorious promises here. And if you tonight are a believer, the Bible is so rich with promises, telling you, for instance, God is saying to you tonight, I will never leave you.

[10 : 56] I will never forsake you. I am with you wherever you go. I am with you to the end of the age. My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.

There are loads of promises in God's word, assuring us of God's continued presence and care.

Jacob didn't have that. Jacob couldn't take an Old Testament Bible out of his pocket, or a New Testament Bible out of his pocket, and leaf through it, and go to, and he said, before he goes to sleep at night and say, I must read a few verses to get some comfort.

Couldn't do that. So we've got to remember where Jacob was. Jacob knew the promises that his grandfather, Abraham, had been given.

Jacob knew the promises that his father, Isaac, had been given. And in fact, Isaac has rehearsed some of these promises in his ears as he goes off. And he says, there's great blessing as Jacob goes away in verse 3, May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you.

May, verse 4, May he give the blessings of Abraham to you, and so on. So Jacob goes away. And I'm sure that these words of his father would have been ringing in his ears, remembering these promises.

[12 : 19] So this is where Jacob is, away from everything, running away. And you know, it's an awfully difficult thing to run away. You know, you can run away and stay in the same place at the same time.

You can run away in your own heart and mind from situations. And there's lots of people run away from different things. We can run away from conflict. We can run away from issues and problems.

We can run away from God. And maybe there are people in here tonight, and this may seem very strange, that you can actually be in God's house, and yet running away from Him.

It doesn't sort of, there's a kind of logic doesn't meet up there, but it happens. That you have come, you are, and thank the Lord that you come to church, and that it's your regular habit to do so.

But you know, you can run from God by keeping Him away, pushing Him away. You come to God's house because somehow you want, you're needing something to solve your conscience and give you an element of peace.

[13 : 23] And this helps you to a certain extent by coming, and yet at the same time you're running away from God. You've run away from God all last week. You've run away from God all this year.

You've run away from God really all your life. As you look back, you don't want to stop and look back. But the bottom line is that that's what you're doing. You're running away from God.

Well, here is Jacob, and he is on the run. But you know, the wonderful thing is, he couldn't run away because God had a hold of her.

And Jacob didn't realize that at that point, the Lord was so close to him. Here's Jacob. He felt so lonely, so vulnerable, so insecure, and the everlasting arms are around him.

As Jacob lies down to sleep that night, little did he realize that he thought all he had was the open sky as that blanket. But he was under the mantle of God's love.

[14 : 24] And so the Lord is now revealing himself to Jacob. And the Lord hasn't changed. Now, of course, the Lord reveals himself to us in the most expected places.

For instance, here in church, when we come to church, it's one of the things we do when we come to church. Surely we come in order for God to reveal himself to us.

Surely that's what you want. Certainly what I want when I come to church is it not part of our prayer is, Lord, tonight or this morning when you come, day or night, Lord, please open the word in such a way that I may see more of you.

Give me to understand something new about yourself. Give me to see you, Lord, in a new way. We're always wanting to meet with the Lord. Otherwise, coming to his house doesn't make sense. We come to God's house to worship the Lord and worship in order that we may meet with him. And that is how it is. And it's the same when we open God's word.

[15 : 34] When we read it privately for ourselves, we want to meet with the Lord. We want to hear what God the Lord will speak to us. But often, God will speak to people.

God will reveal himself through his work. He will reveal himself. He'll begin to work in people's lives, often, outside church. Now, don't for one moment think that I'm saying it doesn't matter whether you come to church or not.

It matters hugely. because God has used the preaching, the word, the reading of the word, but especially the preaching as a means whereby people are awakened, they're touched, they're challenged, they're built up, they're fed.

This is God's way. And we've got to bow under the authority and the wisdom of God. And that is why we must come to God's house.

You remember how it says in Psalm 87 that God has more delight in the gates of Zion than in all the dwellings of Jacob.

[16 : 42] We've got to remember these things. God's house is vital. It's important that we come together and that we meet and worship the Lord. However, having said that, there are times when God will work in people's hearts and lives away from church.

Maybe you're here tonight because that's exactly what happened to you. Maybe it was through something that happened in your life that shook you. Maybe it was at a graveside.

Maybe like Jacob, it was through a dream. Something that happened at night, in the middle of the night. Something that shook you. There are 101 different ways in God's mysterious providence where we can come to begin to seek him.

And so we must never limit the Lord at all. You see, sometimes God comes into people's lives in different ways. Sometimes people who seem to be running in the very opposite direction to God. And the Lord is beginning to work in their lives. We must, you know, we must never judge. We're terribly bad for judging people. And maybe tonight we've made judgments and assessments about people, people in our own lives.

[18 : 01] And we say, oh, he's a hundred miles away from the kingdom. We don't know. That person that you think might be a hundred miles from the kingdom might be very, very close to the kingdom.

We can't judge. Because sometimes people are going, appearing, appearing to be going in the opposite direction. I know a fellow who was brought up in a Christian home and who trampled all that he had in that home underfoot.

He didn't care anything for it. There was one Sunday night in a pub where he was drinking himself silly that just in a second he was convicted powerfully of what he was doing and of all that he had done against God.

and he saw himself as it were sinking into hell. And in a moment he sobered up and he began to seek the Lord and he was saved.

Still a vibrant Christian. And you see, this is how God works. We mustn't limit. I'm sure we all know people who've run away, run away from this island.

[19 : 14] And it's, you know, it's a mysterious thing where they didn't want, this is what I can't get over, they didn't want to be converted. People have run away.

People have run away to the other side of the world to get away from the Christian influence. And on the other side of the world the Lord has saved them. Covenant blessing.

And so we must never limit the Lord. And here is Jacob. He's run away, as it were, from the security and the familiness and the place where he would have expected God's blessing to be.

He had been brought up knowing of these blessings and here he is now, as it were, away from the place of blessing. Away in this lonely, isolated place.

God meets with him. Remember Manasseh? God met with Manasseh. Manasseh, who had the greatest father that Judah had as a king.

[20 : 18] Remember King Hezekiah? Manasseh came to the throne and it's like he spent his life trying to trample into the ground everything his father stood for.

He tried to obliterate the name of God out of the land. He did every abomination that was humanly possible in the sight of God. He slaughtered the believers so that the streets of Jerusalem ran red with the blood of the saints.

And if there was any person that you would have ever thought would have been completely brought under the judgment of God, we find that here's Manasseh languishing in a jail after he had been taken captive.

And it tells us that he cried to the Lord. Isn't that amazing? God wasn't finished. God deals with Manasseh in that prison.

It's the same as Saul of Tarsus, galloping full pelt to put Christians to death and Christians to prison. Hating the name of Christ.

[21 : 24] And if you had lived in Jerusalem in these days and you had seen Saul, you'd say to yourself, Saul, oh, I'm scared of Saul. That's a man to be feared.

He hates us. He hates Christ. He hates the cause. There's no point praying for Saul. And Saul became the great, the great evangelist in the hand of God.

Philippian jailer at the point of killing himself in utter despair in that prison in Philippi. And yet God reaches out. What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And that's exactly what happened. So we cannot limit the Lord. And you see, we must remember this, that the Lord can work anywhere at any time.

And so as Jacob lay down to sleep that night, as we say, little did he realize that the Lord was at work and the Lord was just about to reveal himself. And so we find that Jacob has this amazing dream.

[22 : 34] We're not going through this dream. Just the one thing that we'll say, and I think we've said this before. It's one of the things many people highlight. If we were to make up the story about this ladder or these steps going all the way from heaven down to the earth, the way that we would have it with these angels, because Jacob sees these angels, verse 12, and he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up in the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

Well, if we saw these steps run all the way down from heaven to the earth, and then there were these angels, we would expect that the angels would be coming down, we'd see them coming down step by step, and then maybe going back up.

But the order that we have here is first that they are ascending and then descending. We would expect the order to be first descending and then ascending.

And the reason very simply why Jacob sees the angels first of all ascending is because the angels are already there with him. It's not that the angels were all of a sudden at this point now coming down from heaven to be with him, they're already there because he is an heir of salvation.

That's what we're told in the scripture, that the angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. Isn't that a wonderful thing? My dear friend, maybe you're going through hard times tonight.

[24 : 09] And if you are here and you love the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, I don't know what you might be going through. You might be going through so difficult, heavy experiences. And you wonder, is the Lord here at all with me?

Of course he is. And his angels are ministering to you. You might not be able to see that he's there. You might not be able to feel that he's there. You may feel that he's far, far away from you.

But you know this, I don't know what wilderness experience you're going through, but one day he will reveal himself and show you that he is there. And that all the time he was caring for you.

It's not that all of a sudden he is. That's what the Lord was showing Jacob. The Lord isn't showing Jacob, now Jacob, at this point, I'm going to start caring for you.

The dream was showing Jacob, I am here and already you have been cared for. All the way, when you were at home, you were being cared for. All that journey that you've made, you thought you were on your own, you were being cared for.

[25 : 16] As you lay down to sleep, broken hearted, feeling so lonely and vulnerable, I was there and the angels were watching over you. And that's what the Lord is doing.

He's showing Jacob, you were never on your own. I was with you and I was caring for you and I was protecting you all the time.

Jacob, when he wakes out, he says, surely the Lord was in this place and I knew it not. And you know, I want to say just one thing here.

We can grieve the Lord by saying the Lord isn't here. You know, there are times that we can be guilty of saying, ah, you know, we're on our own. The Lord, Lord's not doing anything.

Lord's not at work anymore. Have we ever said that? How do we know? We cannot see the secret, silent operation of God at work.

[26 : 16] As the Lord said to Nicodemus, the wind blows where it chooses. You can hear the sound thereof, but you cannot tell where it's coming from, where it's going. So it is with the ministry of God's Spirit.

And we can be lamenting the absence of God's presence while God is at work saving us all. I believe we can grieve the Lord by saying the Lord's not with us.

How can we say that? When the Lord has promised to be with us wherever we go, the Lord has promised to be in the midst when we worship together, where even as few or two or three, and yet at the same time we say, ah, the Lord's not with us anymore.

We can't say that. We dare not say that. So we need to be very careful lest we grieve the Lord by what we say. Now, again, there are many things that we can say, but just as we come near the end, we find Jacob saying, how awesome is this place.

This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. See, when Jacob wakened out of his sleep, then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, surely the Lord is in this place and so on.

[27 : 33] Now, I find it very interesting that Jacob sees a light of dawn comes and a new day. This is what I find interesting here is you and I know sometimes in the night, the night is so different to the day.

If we are anxious about something, our anxiety is likely to be far greater in the night than during the day. There's something about the darkness that causes us to be, I don't know what it is, sometimes more perplexed.

Our troubles can sometimes seem bigger at night. Then when the day comes, often these troubles, they fade away, they're not so powerful, they're not so significant.

Well, that's not what happened in Jacob's experience. When the daylight came, it was as real and powerful. There was no sign of the Lord beside him or above. There was no sense of, there was no sign of the angels, there was no sign of the ladder, no sign of any of these things that he had seen. But the reality of it was as powerful as ever. And there was a sense of awe hanging in the air.

Somebody said, it was heavy, the scene was heavy with the presence of God.

[28 : 50] Although the vision was no longer visible, the sense of the presence of God was. And Jacob was in a sense, with a sense of awe.

He says, how awesome is this place. The house of God, this is the very first reference that we have in the Bible to the house of God. And you know, when we come, and that's what he says, Jacob said, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

You know, when we come to God's house, I wonder if we have this kind of sense of what Jacob was talking about here. Because think of what he was seeing. He's seeing the Lord at the top.

He was seeing a way of access, the gate. A gate is a way in. He was seeing the angelic presence. Do we think these thoughts when we come to God's house?

Because we come to worship the Lord. We come to acknowledge Christ as Lord. And Jesus Christ is the gate. He is the way of communication. You see, this ladder that Jacob saw, it was, as it were, a ladder of, speaking of mediation.

[30 : 02] Many people have seen Christ in this ladder. On the earth, his humanity. At the top, his divinity. God, man. The only way of access where we, here in this world, are able to meet with God through the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, Jacob has come to a new awareness. It's a new day in his experience. A new dawn in his life. And yet, we find here in a very clear way how God is showing that he is making this way between earth and heaven.

Have you traveled that way? That's a very important question. You see, we have no other way of securing eternal blessing in this life but in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

See, the Lord is still able to save. And I don't know where you are tonight. That is personal between yourself and the Lord. I will say this, in this building tonight, there are many, many people who have been saved by the Lord.

Have you been saved? If not, ask yourself, why not? Is it because you haven't been seeking him? To a certain extent, there is an element of seeking when you come to God's house.

[31 : 37] I would say that there has to be an interest in your heart to be here. It might not be a great interest, but it's still an interest.

If you had no interest whatever, if the things of God meant nothing to you at all, at all, at all, I don't think you would be here.

I believe it is because there is an interest. But how deep is that interest? That is a question you have to ask yourself. I hope nobody is left unmoved by these things because you know people who have been saved by the Lord.

There may be people who have been saved in your house and you haven't. There may be people who have been saved that you work with and you haven't. Why are you still outside?

Is it because you have not been seeking the Lord? Remember, the Lord is able to save. His power has not changed. Not in the slightest. He is as able and as mighty to save you tonight as he's been able to save anyone.

[32 : 52] You go to him tonight and ask him, Lord, save me. And tonight will become for you just as an amazing experience as it did for Jacob.

And you will look back on this night and the way that Jacob looked back on that experience for the rest of his life. And thank the Lord for it. May you then seek him with all your heart.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks for this word that we have considered and we pray that we might know the presence of God in our own heart and lives.

Deliver us, we pray, from ourselves, from our doubting, from our unbelief, from our inability to often lay hold upon what is so clearly set before us.

We pray that we might embrace Jesus as Savior. We pray for anybody in here tonight who does not know Jesus as their Savior. Oh, Lord, open their hearts.

[34 : 03] Give them to seek, to seek the Lord while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near. And he is near just now. Help us, Lord, to realize that our God is near in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we grab the opportunity. Bless us then, we pray, and take us all home safely, forgiving us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.